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ABSTRACT

The handbook of classroom techniques and activities is designed for teachers in postsecondary institutions who have adult students for whom English is a second language. The underlying philosophy is that the learning experience of these students is not extremely different from those of native English-speaking students, and that their needs and experiences differ in degree, not in kind. The guide addresses these issues in the multicultural classroom context: applying general principles of teaching (explaining the points of the lesson, motivating students, involving students, checking understanding, providing a variety of learning experiences); encouraging students to think; teaching students to ask questions; interactive reading; providing feedback; preparing students for examinations; organizing the classroom; making meaning clear; encouraging students to use new language; and asking questions. Contains six references. (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

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MULTICULTURAL HANDBOOKS

ED 386 964

I: TEACHING MULTICULTURAL CLASSES

by Marilyn Lewis
and
Ray Taylor

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MULTICULTURAL HANDBOOKS

I: TEACHING MULTICULTURAL CLASSES

by Marilyn Lewis
and
Ray Taylor



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FOREWORD

Over the past years we have seen an increase in the number of students from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds (NESB) participating in TAFE courses. This welcome development places virtually every TAFE teacher in a new and rewarding situation, where he/she has to examine the suitability of his/her teaching practice. As the authors conclude in this handbook "good teaching practice in the multicultural classroom makes good teaching for all students".

This is the first book in a series of "Multicultural handbooks" and will be followed by other books which look at different areas and subjects designed to help teachers to enjoy the experience of teaching adults in a multicultural setting. This is based on training materials provided through the last two years' training program and was further developed to meet the expressed needs of teachers who participated in several seminars on teaching strategies for the multicultural classroom. It should prove to be a handy resource book to be consulted from time to time.

The authors were approached to develop and make their training material available to all teachers in TAFE, a task they took up with enthusiasm. They are to be thanked for their valuable efforts and contribution.

Amir Salem
Regional Multicultural
Education Coordinator
RANDWICK COLLEGE OF TAFE

October 1991

CONTENTS

	Page
Introduction	5
1 Applying General Principles of Teaching	6
2 Encouraging Students to Think	9
3 Teaching Students to Ask Questions	11
4 Interactive Reading	13
5 Providing Feedback	15
6 Preparing Students for Examinations	16
7 Organising the Classroom	18
8 Making Meaning Clear	20
9 Encouraging Students to Use New Language	23
10 Asking Questions	26
Conclusion	29
References	30

INTRODUCTION

The topics presented in this booklet are the result of seminars held in various TAFE colleges. The TAFE Multicultural Education Unit through Dorothy Brown invited us to work with teachers at their end-of-year in-service courses and to formulate some of these ideas into booklet form.

Underlying the topics is the following philosophy:

The learning experiences of students from other language backgrounds in classrooms is not extremely different from the experience of students whose first language is English. Their needs and experiences differ only in degree, not in kind. Because a course involves interaction with other teachers, a book cannot capture the spirit of the workshops completely.

The material in this booklet is designed to stimulate your thinking on ways of working with students in multicultural classrooms. The chapters are not arranged in priority order. Dip into topics that seem relevant to you. It makes some suggestions and it poses some questions. As you work through them you could ask yourself two questions

"Which of my present teaching practices could be adapted to suit better all the students in my class?"

"What fresh materials, techniques and learning tasks could I develop next?"

We are grateful to Dorothy Brown for providing the motivation and the practical planning that went into this week.

Marilyn Lewis

Ray Taylor

1. APPLYING GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF TEACHING

One way of approaching teaching strategies in multicultural classrooms is to consider what a good teacher does in regular classes and then to think of details that need modifying when working with new learners of English. Here is a list based on the experiences of many teachers.

A good teacher

1.1 EXPLAINS THE POINT OF THE LESSON TO THE STUDENTS

Usually a teacher does this with written or spoken objectives. An alternative to words can be to ...

- show a sample of a finished piece of work
- show photographs of work situations where people are doing the skill to be learned
- demonstrate the skill at the final speed before slowing down or breaking it into parts to teach it.

1.2 MOTIVATES STUDENTS

When you work with students from a variety of backgrounds you may find that different things motivate different people to do well. The better you know your students individually and as members of dual societies, the more effectively you will be able to motivate them. Here are some questions to ask about the people you teach.

- ☐ Do they enjoy being praised in front of other students?
- ☐ Whom do they look to as the role model?
- ☐ How can your topic be made relevant to their own experiences?

APPLYING GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF TEACHING

- ☐ Do they find it motivating to work individually or in groups?
- ☐ Are comparisons of their work with other students' work helpful to them?

1.3 INVOLVES STUDENTS

Student involvement is easy when your students express themselves in the same way as the teacher. If you are working with students who are accustomed to classrooms where the teaching is mainly lecturing, they may need to be shown the point of other learning activities. For instance, "You are going to take turns at presenting reports to the class because when you start work one of the things you'll have to do is present reports on".

1.4 CHECKS UNDERSTANDING

Asking "Have you understood?" is not an effective way of checking your students' understanding. Try some of these techniques instead.

- ☐ Ask students to explain something back to you in their own words.
- ☐ Set questions that don't test English expression as well as knowledge of the subject.
- ☐ Ask students to show you how to do something.
- ☐ Ask probing questions with "why?" and "how?" after their initial answer.

APPLYING GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF TEACHING

- ☐ Find out if one part of the topic is understood before going on to the next.

1.5 PROVIDES A VARIETY OF LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Often a single topic can be presented in a number of ways. Consider how many of these you could have available in one topic you teach:

- ☐ a case study
- ☐ a set of guidelines
- ☐ questions and answers
- ☐ material from the work force with learning tasks attached
- ☐ information with gaps to be completed as the learner listens or watches.

1.6 ENCOURAGES STUDENTS TO THINK

This subject is expanded in the next chapter.



2. ENCOURAGING STUDENTS TO THINK

Teachers are concerned that students should not only remember what has been learned in class, but also think for themselves about the new learning. The great strength of a multicultural class is that you have in one room students who have learned to think in a great variety of ways. Their answers to your questions, provided you ask open questions, are no longer as predictable as they are when all your students come from the same educational system. In this section we present some typical "problems" as perceived by teachers, along with some ideas you could try, to turn these problems into strengths.

Further suggestions for thinking are in the next two sections on students' questions and reading.



ENCOURAGING STUDENTS TO THINK

Which of these is
your concern?

Try these ideas

"My students see me as the only source of truth in the room. They don't like listening to one another's viewpoints"

When you organise group tasks, move around the room giving input to each group

Sum up group findings on the board so that students don't feel they have missed out on an important part of the work.

"I find that students want the right answer to every question. They can't accept that some things are absolute."

Distinguish the points of your topic where there are facts and the parts where different viewpoints have to be taken into account.

In your handouts include a variety of direct quotations from people qualified in your field.

"Some students are afraid that having to think in new ways means rejecting the values of their families."

Choose your examples from a variety of cultural backgrounds

Include people from many ethnic backgrounds as visiting speakers as source people for community surveys.

Encourage the recruitment of teachers from the same ethnic origin as the students.

3. TEACHING STUDENTS TO ASK QUESTIONS

The number and quality of students' questions are a visible sign of their thinking and understanding. Teachers frequently say they want students to ask more and better questions.

WHAT MAKES STUDENTS GOOD QUESTIONERS?

Good classroom questions are asked when the following factors come together. How many of these factors do you feel you have some control over in your class?

- ☐ an enquiring mind
- ☐ past experience of answering questions helpfully
- ☐ hearing other people's thoughtful questions
- ☐ something tangible to ask questions about
- ☐ enough vocabulary to put a question into words
- ☐ being in a class that isn't critical when someone asks a question
- ☐ believing that the person you are asking can provide some answers

In a multicultural classroom, students may have come from school systems where asking questions of a teacher is not a normal part of classroom learning. Therefore a teacher has to work at indicating both in words and in practice that questions are part of the students' responsibility for their own learning.

TEACHING STUDENTS TO ASK QUESTIONS

HOW CAN THE TEACHER HELP?

Here are some specific suggestions for teaching your students to ask questions. By the time you have tried them out, you will probably have more hints to pass on to colleagues.

- ☐ Ask students to read something at home and prepare questions for the next day. You start the next lesson with questions and answers.
- ☐ Stop part-way through the lesson for question time. Give a minute or two for students to write down questions before asking them.
- ☐ Move around the room while students are doing a task so that they can ask you questions informally.
- ☐ Remind students of the different kinds of questions they could be asking about a particular topic. (Some "why" questions, some "how" questions, and so on.)
- ☐ Spend time in class letting students know why questions are important in understanding a new idea.
- ☐ Ask students to hand in written questions before a lesson.
- ☐ Talk about other places to go for answers to their questions
eg: another student
people in the workforce
books, periodicals, the library
- ☐ Provide data that makes people want to ask questions about it.
- ☐ The teacher's own questions become a model of good questions.

4. INTERACTIVE READING

The following suggestions for encouraging your students to think as they read could be applied to all classes. However, they are even more necessary if your students have seen academic reading as something passive, whereby they simply find out facts they didn't know before. Which of these models is closest to your students' views of the reading process?



The idea of interactive reading is that the reader brings something to the text. Not all readers do this automatically. For some, the struggle to decode the text is such that they cannot think beyond the decoding. For others, books have been expensive, rare tools in their schooling and a source of all the "answers".

To overcome these problems you can try setting guided reading tasks which allow students to think as they are reading. This is different from the traditional questions set after reading to see what they have remembered and understood.

INTERACTIVE READING

SAMPLE INTERACTIVE READING TASKS

Before you read this article, write down some questions you would like the article to answer.

Each time the writer makes a point, write down one example from your own past experience.

As you read, tick (✓) the viewpoints you agree with and cross (x) those you disagree with.

Use a highlighter on parts of the chapter that tell you something you didn't know before.

Put a question mark (?) in the margin beside everything you'd like to question in class tomorrow.

Write an opposite point of view for some of the opinions expressed in this article.

As you finish each paragraph try predicting what the next one will be about.

Some topics lend themselves to one kind of thinking more than another. You will no doubt think of many more tasks appropriate to particular topics you teach to your students and the reading matter.

5. PROVIDING FEEDBACK

Many of the general guidelines for providing students with feedback on their work apply equally to a multicultural classroom. For instance:

- ☐ Specific comments are more helpful than general comments.
- ☐ Comment on aspects the student can do something about.

However, in a multicultural classroom there are further considerations. Students may not follow the subtleties of your comments. Intonation that is meant to be encouraging may sound critical to the student. Here are some suggestions:

- ☐ Show examples of good work for students to measure their efforts by.
- ☐ Encourage students to comment on one another's work in their own languages.
- ☐ Ask students first what they think about their own work to remind yourself of the words they can understand.
- ☐ Support your words with encouraging facial expressions. Comment during, not after a demonstration.
- ☐ Take time to discuss written feedback individually later.

New learners of English do not want to be patronised. You need not pretend a piece of work is good when everyone, including the student, can see that it isn't. Your role in providing feedback is to guide the students in knowing exactly why a piece of work is good or not up to standard, to motivate them to keep trying, despite their extra load of having to work through a new language.

6. PREPARING STUDENTS FOR EXAMINATIONS

For all students there are at least four steps in doing an examination successfully.

- ☐ Understanding the subject matter.
- ☐ Understanding the examination question.
- ☐ Remembering what has been understood.
- ☐ Writing an answer in an acceptable form.

For new learners of English there are some further barriers:

- ☐ The language of the examination instruction is different from normal spoken language.
- ☐ Several instructions are given in one sentence.
- ☐ Students cannot find the essential part of the question.
- ☐ Students don't know the conventions of setting out written answers.



PREPARING STUDENTS FOR EXAMINATIONS

Some tactics teachers have adopted to overcome these barriers are suggested here, but it is worth remembering also that clearly worded examination questions are appreciated by all students.

- ☐ Sometimes use the written form of the instruction when you are speaking. This applies particularly to abstract words like 'factors', 'principles' and so on, which are not subject-specific.
- ☐ Give students practice in breaking down a question into its separate parts.
- ☐ Show students how to turn a written question into a spoken question in order to get to the heart of it.

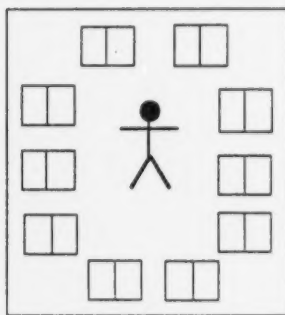
eg Give reasons for = Why?
 What proportion of = How much?

- ☐ Show model answers and analyse them.
- ☐ Compare good answers and poorer answers. Discuss the differences.
- ☐ Give practice in writing answers within time limits.

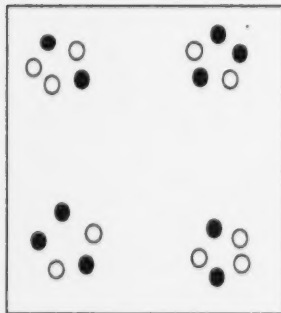
As well as preparing their students for examinations, many teachers of multicultural classes also campaign for the wording of examination questions to be clearer.

7. ORGANISING THE CLASSROOM

A multicultural classroom may be varied in many more ways than country of origin. There are likely to be differences of age, of social class and in previous levels of schooling, to mention just three. Therefore there is even more reason than usual for teachers to have times when students are working in small groups, in pairs or individually. Here are some suggestions:



Paired work with a more able student teaching another. The teacher is available as a resource.



Small group works with a particular focus:

FORMS OF GROUPING PURPOSE

Same language
grouping

To discuss new learning in their
own language.

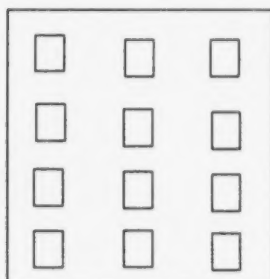
ORGANISING THE CLASSROOM

Cross-language
grouping

To use the new terms in the subject as they comment on samples of work.

Same ability
grouping

To look at extension material at various levels.



Individual work using graded materials with self-marking guides.

Whole class
teaching

For watching a demonstration or for listening to the teacher's initial explanation.

Arrangements such as those suggested here demand a good source of learning materials and a well-planned teacher.



8. MAKING MEANING CLEAR

Having a wide vocabulary in the subjects they are studying is the basis of being able to talk and write about that subject. Other people can understand what is said or written despite some errors in grammar, but without content words there is no meaning.

As you read these suggestions for building up your students' vocabulary, try to think of examples from the subjects you teach.

8.1 FIRST-HAND EXPERIENCES

Understanding the meaning of new terms is much easier if real things are happening at the same time. How can you organise first-hand experiences in your subjects?

eg. students at the keyboard watching and touching as the teacher introduces some basic theory.

8.2 PICTURES AND PHOTOGRAPHS

In many classrooms it is unrealistic to talk about having first-hand experiences. In this case pictures and photographs are a good second best.

eg. In a horticultural class students match a list of terms with sketches of different types of plant.

MAKING MEANING CLEAR

8.3 DEMONSTRATIONS

Some subjects appear to lend themselves to demonstrations more readily than others. Remember, though, that using your hands to show movement and space can be effective and needs no equipment.

- eg. In a plumbing class the teacher using his hands continually to show where one part goes in relation to another. Notice here that you must avoid words like 'this', 'that' and 'it'. Students need to keep hearing the new word.

8.4 EXAMPLES

Examples can be the real thing as with samples of sewing or welding. They can also be examples conjured up with words. Many teachers are very good at this.

- eg. A building teacher keeps giving examples from his work experience of times when safety regulations were or were not followed.

8.5 DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

Learning a new word for something involves knowing in what way this new word is different from similar words and ideas already known.

- eg. To understand the concept of inertia, students think about what happens in 'inertia' seat belts in cars.

MAKING MEANING CLEAR

8.6 TRANSLATION

Occasionally it may be faster for a student in your class to explain a word for other students in their own language. This is a quick way of providing meaning for the new English term.

8.7 PARALLEL EXPERIENCES

A further way to make clear the meaning of new words is to remind students of parallel experiences they have had.

eg. In explaining new terms in nursing subjects, teachers make parallels between the arteries and busy highways.

SUMMARY

- ☐ Choose an appropriate method to explain the meaning.
- ☐ Use the new word many times.
- ☐ Avoid the normal speech pattern of using reference words (it, which, this).

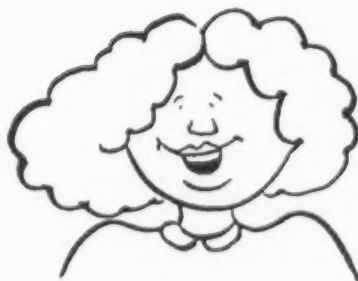


9. ENCOURAGING STUDENTS TO USE NEW LANGUAGE

As we have seen in the last chapter, understanding new terms in a subject is fundamental to understanding the subject. Unfortunately many students, whether new speakers of English or not, remain at the passive or receptive stage in their use of the language of their subject.

Could you estimate what the proportions would be for your students?

I understand ____%
of the words when
I hear them and
____% of the words
when I read them.



I use ____% of the
new words in
writing. I have a
chance to say
____% of the
words in class-
room activities.

If you estimate that the percentages are better for understanding than using the language (and they usually are), then you can start to increase the active language opportunities in your classroom.

As a start, how many of the following are blocks to the use of new language by all students in your class?

OBSTACLES FOR SOME STUDENTS

- ☐ Questions tend to be answered by those whose language expression is already faster.
- ☐ Not feeling confident with the pronunciation of a new term.
- ☐ No need ever to say the new terms in class.
- ☐ Few natural opportunities to discuss the new subject with others.
- ☐ Not hearing or reading the new terms often enough.

You may think of other obstacles. More positively, what are the opportunities for students to use the words?

Here are some ideas to start you thinking. They are not complicated to organise.

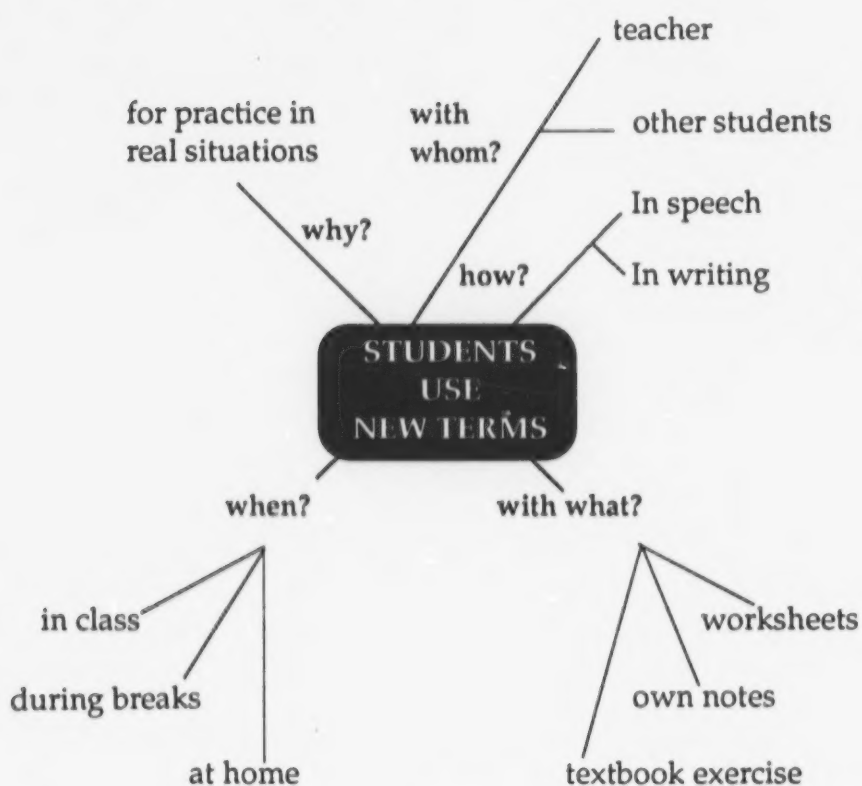
- ☐ At the end of one lesson or the start of the next, each student must write out a question that uses at least one new term and which requires a new term in the answer. Spend a few minutes having the questions fired around the room.
- ☐ Provide an unlabelled diagram to be completed by students as they watch you label a diagram on the board or overhead.
- ☐ Students work in pairs to check each other on unfinished sentences.

eg. The /process of is called

Thinking creatively will lead you to find many ways in which students

ENCOURAGING STUDENTS TO USE NEW LANGUAGE

can start using the new terms in speech and in writing. Exchange ideas with colleagues in other subjects. Add to this sketch.



10. ASKING QUESTIONS

All courses for teachers emphasise the skill of asking questions. We ask questions to make students think about new ideas, to check their understanding, as a model of the enquiring mind and because some jobs require people to be able to answer questions.

In multicultural classrooms there are some further considerations:

- ☐ How familiar are your students with speaking out in class?
- ☐ Do they expect that for each question there is only one 'right' answer?
- ☐ Is it more difficult for them to think of the words for the answer than the ideas?
- ☐ Can they distinguish between rhetorical questions and those that you want an answer to?

You may have to train your students in some of these aspects.

HOW MANY ANSWERS?

If students are familiar only with closed questions you may have to encourage them to keep thinking. Look at some ways in which teachers question classes and receive students' answers. Which of these might lead students to answer more questions?

ASKING QUESTIONS



Yes, that's right.
Can anyone suggest
another example?

Tell me why we
hold the tool
this way?



No, that's not the
answer I told you
yesterday!



You've given me part of the
answer. Good. Who can add
something?



Let's hear a few
opinions on why
this safety
regulation exists.



X, you haven't answered
for a while. Here's a tricky
one for you.



Yes. Keep going.
Someone else? Yes,
and another?
That's it.



Obviously some teachers need to word their questions better. Others need to work on the encouragement aspect of their questions.

ASKING QUESTIONS

WORDING OF QUESTIONS

Generally (but not always) classroom questions starting with 'what', 'when' and 'where' suggest a 'right' answer. However, you can always indicate that there are several possible answers.

eg. What *might* happen if

Let's think of some times when

What *could* you do if

ENCOURAGEMENT

Apart from the occasional answer designed by a student to entertain the class, most responses represent someone's attempt to think. With students from a variety of cultural backgrounds it is even more important to give positive reinforcement to their efforts at answering.

Of course there are questions to which there is only one answer. Mathematical calculations are an obvious example. On the other hand, if your motive is not only to check understanding but also to encourage thinking, you will move more towards 'open' questions.

Section two dealt with other aspects of encouraging students to think.

CONCLUSION

The chapters in this booklet have raised as many questions as they have answered. That is the intention.

A second intention is to suggest that good teaching practice for multicultural classes makes good teaching for all students.

We wish you all the best in your teaching.



REFERENCES

In preparing for the topics in this booklet we referred to several articles from the following journals:

"New Settlers and Multicultural Education Issues", Department of Education, Wellington, New Zealand.

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